

The Heart of the Dragon

BY PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS

IN all San Francisco's Chinatown, gilded with sunlight and richly splashed with color, there was not another sight so quaint, so bright, or so engaging as that of pretty little Suey Ling—motherless and only five years old—sitting alone in the doorway of her father's house, holding fast to a poor old headless doll as if she felt that it too might be just about to pass from her tiny grasp forever.

She was a gayly dressed but sober little woman-child, with large, brown, half-awed eyes, a tiny mouth sensitive with eagerness for affection, and the roundest and smoothest of tinted-bronze cheeks imaginable. Her tiny feet, in their wee yellow boats of shoes, were as motionless as her two dimpled, doll-clasping hands, for she had a fear.

Whether she remembered how death had come to take away her mother, and knew certain signs of its approach, or whether she partially comprehended some vague intuition respecting her father's fatal illness now, may never be known; yet she sat in the very corner of the doorway, instinctively making room for death to pass, and for a long time nothing came there to keep her company save the sunlight, generous and comforting.

Nevertheless, as she sat there, demure and alone, a Chinese melody, teased from a one-stringed violin, at last came floating down from the casement above, and gave her great pleasure, despite the fact that its cadence was overburdened with sentiments of newly budded love.

It was Luey Mow, a Chinese youth of two-and-twenty, who played with such impassioned fervor. He was joyously confiding certain transports of ecstasy to the various gods who might have been attracted to this particular neighborhood of Chinatown by sundry red lanterns and Oriental symbols in green and gold. He was very much in love indeed with an altogether delightful Chinese maiden at

present secure from Mongolian intrigue in the Rescue House, that was roofed and fenced by white man's law and governed by white man's women. The maiden's name was Nikku Loy, and in memory of certain glances bestowed upon him obliquely from her eyes, Luey played and sang a rapture vocally expressible only in a very high falsetto voice. He sang a continued novelette, concerning the manner of his love, for each and every day of the year, the tale enriched and supplemented by a florid recital of the names of the gods who would esteem the mating between himself and Nikku Loy an obedience to their most celestial wishes.

It was a pleasant song—from a Chinese point of contemplation. Little Suey Ling opened wide her tiny ears and tiny nature, as she sat in the sunlight, to receive every chirrup, accent, and squeak of the one-stringed rhapsody. And the squeaks were many. To her lonely little being, however, the notes came like invisible playmates, to nestle in the lap of her heart. She sat so still and listened so intently that she did not even observe the hard, ugly face of a large Chinese man, revealed at a window of the opposite house, as the creature glared across the narrow street at her pretty little figure. Indeed, when he came from his door at last and stood for a moment looking hungrily upon her, she continued oblivious to everything save that melody of love.

Impatiently the man surveyed the street. It was all but deserted. Again he regarded the listening little girl as he once more revolved his meditations. There she sat, in easy reach—worth at least three hundred dollars, and her father perhaps already dead! A galvanic spasm contracted the muscles of the man's tense limbs as he abruptly restrained an impulse to dart across the way and snatch little Suey thus prematurely. But he thought of a method far

more crafty, and furtively retreated to his hovel.

In half an hour the music ceased, and eager little Suey felt that the friendly squeaks and chirrups had returned to their home. Then the sunlight also deserted her corner and left her in the cooling shadow.

Afraid to arise and enter the house, afraid to remain where the dusk was stealing in upon her so mystically, little Suey tried her utmost to suppress a tiny shiver and to face the dreaded things of coming night, already weaving shades about the precious form of her doll. Her little arms were aching with the tension of her grasp; her tiny heart was trembling timidly at the silence. Then a stealthy sound behind her, in the house, abruptly cast a paralyzing terror on her being.

In her father's door stood the Chinese ogre who had glared at her so covetously from across the street. He had come to the house by a hidden way.

Some ugly sound of greed and satisfaction escaped his lips. He caught up the child, who clung in frenzy to her doll, and fleeing through the silent dwelling, entered a passage he knew at the rear, and thus came, by ways black and devious, to a safe and dark retreat, where waiting for night could involve no complications.

Here he lighted a candle, and seating the silent, fluttering child on the top of a box, muttered horribly frightening calculations on her worth in the market of slaves. Little Suey dared not move so much as an inch. She dared not cry or speak a word. To her doll she clung with a new desperation.

Apparently rendered tinier by the huge, engulfing shadows of the place, and further dwarfed by the great, repulsive form of the man who towered there above her, Suey seemed the merest little plaything of the Fates, gayly clothed as she was in yellow, red, and green, and seated here alone, fatherless, motherless, and friendless—a sweet, tiny morsel of womanhood to bait a lifelong tragedy.

Her captor sat down at his gloating at length to await the fall of all-concealing darkness. For nearly an hour little Suey remained quite motionless upon her box, only a trifle less terrified than she finally became the moment the man once

more took her up in his arms to convey her away from the place.

The way they went was partially open to the darkness of the starlit evening, but much of the route was by the blackest passages. Thus they came at length to a basement of proved security, wherein abided a female creature, old, seamed with coarseness, and long before despoiled of beauty, conscience, and nearly all her feminine emotions. It was she who opened the door at the man's peculiar signal; and it opened on a veritable cavern of unilluminated gloom.

The trembling and orphaned little captive—clinging in utter despair to her doll—was placed in the slave-woman's arms, the doll being caught and torn from one of its legs by the process of transfer.

At the touch of something feminine, in all this darkness, little Suey was almost overcome with relief and gratitude. She threw one arm about the hardened woman's neck and held with all her baby strength to the "mother" she felt but could not see. She sobbed out one little smothered speech of imploring and confidence, nestling as if from every harm on the bosom where feeling had long since parched for lack of tears or milk.

"Go in and shut the door," said the man. "I stay but a moment to inform you that you keep and guard this little property of mine with your life."

He pushed the woman into the basement blackness, and following, closed the door himself. At the sound of his voice little Suey crept yet closer to the woman's neck, her other tiny hand fast gripping an arm of her doll.

"This child is very young," said the woman.

"I know," interrupted the abductor. "She is very young, and five or six years is long to feed her and wait; yet she is gifted with beauty, and her price will increase far faster than her appetite."

The woman inquired, "She is to live with me?—and learn of me?"

"Until I take her elsewhere," answered the man. "And that I may find her here every day when I come, I give you warning that upon her loss you suddenly perish."

"But," said the woman, "she is of much value, even now, and belongs, no doubt, to some one else. If by chance

she is stolen, I being but a woman, old and alone—"

"If she is stolen, your fortune is ill, for then you die," replied the man. "Keep care in your house that bad luck may not enter."

In the darkness he reached out and caught the woman by the hair, with which he filled his fist for a brutal tightening. Then he let himself out, and his "properties" remained in the basement there together.

For a moment the woman felt a burning resentment against little Suey surge hotly through her veins. The child was more than a care—she was certainly a menace. Responding to the cruelty and callousness long engendered in her nature, the abandoned slave creature placed a violent hand on the little captive's neck in a gesture of rage that abruptly overwhelmed some tentative feeling of elation that the child's soft clinging had awakened.

At the touch of unkind fingers little Suey suddenly felt that the ogreish man had snatched her anew. She tightened her grip on the woman's collar and cried out the equivalent for "Mamma!" in her fright.

The fingers relaxed and retreated. The woman stood there, either unwilling to move or temporarily incapable of action. An overwhelming desire to see the child, to look on her soft baby face, presently took possession of the woman's every faculty. She felt her way along the wall of the passage, and so came at length to a solid door which opened on a living-room, the features of which were dimly revealed by the rays of a small lighted lamp.

Locking herself and the child in this apartment, she placed little Suey on a couch and regarded her intently. Indeed, the inspection was mutual. And the child, beholding the coarse, hard features of the being to whom she had clung, felt some awful sensation of bereavement and dread come heavily upon her. Slowly she placed her one small disengaged arm across her eyes and hung her head.

Some unfamiliar sound, at least half anguish, escaped the woman's lips. The child's unspoken accusation was too poignant to be borne. It could not be

real; even one like herself could not be such a sport of the Fates—she could not have felt that something stir within her, at a baby's touch, only to have it mocked like this!

She knelt on the floor and held out her arms.

"Baby—come," she said, almost harshly, more in command than persuasion.

Little Suey made no motion whatsoever. Her tiny arm was still before her face, shutting out the vision she had seen.

Then the woman struck herself upon the breast and rose to her feet, laughing at the weakness and the folly to which she had almost succumbed. But she could not laugh away the memory of that almost painful ecstasy which, vouchsafed her in the dark, had darted through the indurated fibre of her womanhood when the child had clung on her bosom for refuge and a hope. She could not drive all this away with a blow upon the outside shell of her being.

Somewhat roughly she undressed the supperless little prisoner, snatching away the mutilated doll to facilitate the operation. Despite the fact that little Suey made no sound of grief at this, nevertheless the woman knew the little thing was anguished beyond expression to be robbed thus ruthlessly of her plaything. It was perhaps a small concession to make, but the slave-woman presently caught up the doll and thrust it again into the empty little arms as she tucked the tiny captive into bed.

Once, next day, the woman tried again to coax little Suey to her arms. Again she failed, for Suey was afraid. Then a process commenced.

At the outset it was more in the nature of a contest than an evolution. The woman's better nature, parched to the merest kernel, attempting now to sprout, was at war with all the ugliness her life had developed for years. But if callousness had been augmented in her thoughts and habits, none the less had her woman's thirst for motherhood increased. A mighty force, long pent, well-nigh forgotten, like that in an acorn dry and old, was swelling with growth at the touch of childish helplessness at last.

At the coming of the second day, no longer able to endure the famine in her bosom, the woman had recourse to

an art. She sought out her paints, cosmetics, and oils, with the which she had once given beauty to her face, when beauty was essential in her trade. With these she labored for two long hours, concealing the lines of harshness, age, and sin, and the sallow hues of shamelessness her features had acquired. She made herself pretty and youthful and gay. She brought out faded glories from her dressing-case in which to robe her form. She conjured back a smile to her unused lips; she honeyed her voice and scented her hands. Then, praying to all-but-forgotten Chinese gods to give her grace, she once again, in fear and eagerness, approached her silent little companion and begged her to be friends.

All day she coaxed and wooed and smiled—her lost arts of softness returning uncertainly, like lost or wayward lambs. At the end little Suey slipped quietly into the outheld arms—doll and all—and felt the bosom where she lay toss painfully with sobs that could not find an exit large enough to let them issue forth.

When Fate sits down at her loom to weave, she loveth a closely knit design. Into the pattern concerned with tiny Suey Ling the musical rhapsody of youthful Luey Mow had found its way on the afternoon of the bold abduction, but with this Dame Fate was not to be content.

Aware of the utter futility of perpetrating Chinese serenades that were lost on the air a good half-mile from the ears of Nikku Loy, Luey Mow was making bold to advance his hopes in directions more substantial.

There exists a certain mundane proverb to the effect that the time to guard all valued possessions is the moment when a stranger comes with gifts in either hand; for gifts not only blind the eyes, but obscure the senses altogether.

At the Rescue Home for Chinese girls and women, whither lovelorn Luey Mow began to stray with increasing frequency, there was one shrewd guardian of the inner keep who was fully aware of the need for added vigilance the moment the young Chinese Lothario brought the first "present" in his blouse. She was a blue-eyed, resolute young woman of the finest Anglo-American conception. She was

more than merely manager of the house—she was brains and heart of the work in its entirety. She knew her business thoroughly, she knew the ways of human nature moderately, and she knew the habit of Chinese mental construction partially; but what next to expect she knew not at all.

The gift that Luey proffered was a sacred Chinese lily. It was a nice lily, and Luey was a nice, clean-looking, honest young fellow, born and raised in San Francisco. He had learned to cook, sweep, clean the house and make beds in approved American fashion, and all without in the least foregoing an exceptional popularity among his fellow yellow men of San Francisco's great Oriental community. As an officer of one of the Chinese tongs, or secret societies, he enjoyed not only a wide and intimate knowledge of Chinatown, but likewise a very considerable power. He was sober, industrious, wholesome. Many a good reason existed for encouraging his hopes of becoming the husband of some deserving Chinese girl.

There was little to be learned of Luey Mow that had not been promptly ascertained when first he came to the Rescue Home, where they knew he was doubtless in quest of a wife. His record had been found acceptable. Nevertheless, while the home was glad to supply nice Chinese Juliets to devoted and honest Chinese Romeos, the gift of a sacred lily only served to sharpen the keen-edged faculties of the blue-eyed young woman in control. She had known nice Chinese Romeos to prove treacherous. It was not, however, till Luey came with a very fine lantern, a sack of weird Chinese candy, a modest bale of punks, and several packages of firecrackers—all presents—that certain of the warning signals were flashed along the line.

"Me heap likee Lescue Home," announced the smiling Luey, candidly. "China New-year come pletty soon, you sabbee? Make velly happy. Melly, melly New-year, you sabbee?"

"Yes, very merry New-year," answered the blue-eyed keeper of certain destinies. "Thank you, Luey. You are very kind."

"Yeh—me likee Lescue Home," repeated Luey, smiling nervously.

"Which girl?" demanded the governor of things fateful.

Luey stared, then laughed again. He was quite embarrassed by this sudden penetration of his motives. Yet he had courage.

"You velly smaht lady," said he, in obvious honesty. "Me likee git Nikku Loy for mally for my wife."

The arbiter of fates sat down.

"You'd like to marry Nikku Loy? Has Nikku ever seen you?"

"Oh yeh." Luey nodded affirmatively at least twenty times, perhaps once for each time that he and Nikku Loy had seen each other.

"Does she like you?"

Luey was attacked by confusion and haste of the pulse all at once. He could make no response.

"Well, never mind that part; I'll ask her myself," supplemented Luey's interrogator. She studied the situation in silence for a moment. Luey underwent a vague alarm.

"You likee 'nother China lily?" said he. "Make velly plitty flower."

"No; I want something better than another of your lilies," replied the blue-eyed young woman, rather sternly. "Luey Mow, a few days ago old Hop Sing died in Chinatown. You know that?"

Luey said that he did.

"Very well. Some Chinaman stole his little girl, Suey Ling, and carried her away to sell her for a slave. One time your Nikku Loy was all same that little girl—sold to be a slave. To-day she's a nice, sweet girl—good for Chinese boy's wife—you sabbee? That's all account this Rescue Home. We kept her nice and good and sweet. You know all that. Now I want you to get that little girl that belonged to old Hop Sing. You bring her here to me and I'll let you marry Nikku Loy for your wife. You sabbee that?"

Luey "savvied" very well indeed. He understood every word, every intimation conveyed by the young woman's announcement, and he felt a trifle faint. He knew what a horrible, hopeless life of shame would have closed about his Nikku Loy had she not been saved from a fate far worse than just mere slavery or death. He knew what the awful story of little Suey Ling must be, some day, were she not snatched soon from the infamy planned for her lot. He knew all this,

and it made him ill, for he likewise comprehended the difficulty of wrenching asunder the bonds that held every Chinese slave in Chinatown, as well as he understood the penalty that any Chinese moralist would invite who interfered with the horrible traffic and left his trail uncovered. He was pale as he stood there, rapidly thinking.

"Me not know where she gone," he said, truthfully enough. "Velly many Chinaman—velly many bad places in Chinatown."

"I know," replied the keeper of the home. "But you would like to marry Nikku Loy. She is a very nice girl, and very pretty—make good wife. All right; but you find Hop Sing's little girl first. You very smart boy. I can't let you marry Nikku Loy till you bring me that poor little child."

Luey studied the pattern of the wall-paper up at the top. After a time he said: "Velly hard to find small China girl in Chinatown. Velly hard to take away and bling here."

"Well—Nikku is very nice," repeated the resolute young savior of Chinese slaves. "And that's the only way you can get her for a wife. You go see what you can do. That's all, Luey. Now good-by."

Luey studied the paper, the curtain, the nearest chair, and the carpet. He turned his hat over in his hand.

"Not see Nikku Loy to-day?" he inquired.

"No, not to-day."

After a moment of silence he spoke again. "Good-by," he said.

Then, having let him out at the door, the blue-eyed young woman of the great white family went straight to Nikku Loy herself, who presently confessed, in certain pretty ways of diffidence, that she had seen Luey Mow and liked exceedingly to dwell in thought upon him as an honorable husband of the future.

And the breath from the sweet old Garden of Eden was surpassingly fresh and welcome to the utterly feminine heart of the woman whose honest eyes were blue.

When two long, trying weeks had passed and the Chinese New-year was almost come, the hopes in the breast of

Luey Mow were all but prepared for the grave.

He had squandered his time for sleeping, and paid out all his days, together with much of his hoarded savings, in a desperate quest for little Suey Ling that as yet had proved utterly futile. And Nikku the beautiful, Nikku the much desired, Nikku who loved him—by the sweet confession of her glance, oblique and brown,—how vastly unattainable she was now become, with this awful task so blackly yawning, like a very gulf, between herself and him!

Much as he knew of Chinatown, its ways, its dens, and its denizens, Luey had learned almost nothing of the fate of little Suey Ling. Certain friends of his, brought into requisition by the crisis, had executed a number of underground manoeuvres, all of which had brought nothing to the light of day. Meantime the various tongs of Chinatown, intent upon persuading one battalion of gods to beget enlarged prosperity for the coming year, and equally intent upon mightily affrighting yet another squad of gods, whose evil and malice are widely known, devised a huge celebration, ritual and ceremonial, for the oncoming New-year, now so close at hand. The famous Chinese dragon, fire-devouring, flame-emitting, noise-creating, and altogether fearful, was to issue from its lair again and writhe through all the streets of Chinatown, whence demons would instantly flee with naught but panic in their bellies. Inasmuch as Luey Mow had previously demonstrated his worthiness as a species of mainspring to actuate and animate the dreadful beast, he was promptly called to service now. Indeed, in a Chinese rhapsody—begotten by liberal indulgence in Oriental gin and further inspired by contemplation of certain fowl-tracks, printed in the dust like so much Chinese chirography—a local poet penned a New-year ode in which Luey was described as nothing less than the very "heart of the dragon."

It thus transpired that Luey found himself instructed to penetrate to the cavernous den of the cloth-and-tinsel creature, wake it up, straighten out its kinks, rehorrorize its ugliness, and otherwise render its monstrous form presentable and awful. To him was likewise

delegated the task of selecting and instructing the thirty or forty odd Chinese athletes who, with himself, would crawl inside the dragon's skin, on the night when its fearful lengths would walk, for the purpose of infusing life, noise, fire, and enthusiasm into its otherwise hollow and echoing interior.

The quest for little Suey Ling was, perforce, temporarily abandoned. Luey knew too much not to value his own importance and popularity here with his kind. Reluctantly, however, he entered into the duties of this latest honorary office. Heartless, discouraged, torn by reflections on his starving love, he sat, this morning of the second wasted week, waiting for a couple of husky laborers to come and furnish the muscle necessary to uncrumple the dragon in its basement retreat. When the fellows appeared he led them dejectedly through alley and street and a winding passage to the basement in question, where the fire-eating monster lay biting the dust and smelling somewhat stoutly of dyestuffs, paint, and mouldering cloth.

"Pull it out gently, lest you wound it with roughness," instructed Luey, gazing at the crushed-down and dully glittering features of the mighty worm. "Its tail comes first. It is sitting on its head."

His eyes were rapidly becoming accustomed to the darkness. His ear it was, however, that presently took on alertness, for a foreign sound came lightly on the dusty air from an opening barred with iron that penetrated the partition separating this from the basement next adjoining.

Quick to acquaint himself with anything and everything offered, Luey stepped over the flat and wrinkled skin of the dragon and glanced for a second through the aperture. The sight he beheld nearly robbed him of his breath.

There on the opposite side of the grating, attracted hither by the noise of disturbing the dragon's form, was the painted slave-woman whose care it was to guard and feed little captive Suey Ling. And Suey herself, already faded, wan, and thin—already a tiny slave to inexpressible awe, unhappiness, and gloom,—was in the woman's arms, and gazing straight at the bars between herself and the cave where lay the hibernating worm.

It was only a glance that Luey bestowed on the two watched prisoners, there in their hole, but a glance was sufficient. He knew not only the grave little child of old Hop Sing, deceased, but he also knew the woman, whom in pity he had somewhat befriended at the time of her illegal landing at the port.

With a mad, loud beating at his heart, he turned away from the grating, speaking to his men and furtively exploring the basement, till he found a locked and unused door that led directly from the place to the sidewalk in the street above. Then, fifteen minutes later, when the shell of the dragon had been dragged to the semisecret passage, he passed by the window once more and looked again in the den beyond.

There was no one in sight, but excitement possessed him none the less, and his busy brain was madly at work with the meagre facts at last vouchsafed him by the Fates.

All day he wrought on the dragon with his men, a feverish light burning in his eyes. That evening he opened the barrier to the creature's cave and reentered the place, quite alone. Closing the entrance door with care, he lighted a candle, and going to the iron-barred opening, called softly on the name of the woman he had seen.

There was no response. On the farther side was darkness, thick and absolute. He called again, and yet again, sending his voice on its quest in a low but penetrative aspirate.

In despair at last he could have cursed at mystery and all its brood of things so dark and silent. Then, as if very far from where he stood, appeared a tiny point of light; and subtly to his senses crept a smell of burning stuff. He recognized both the spark and the odor. A lighted punk-stick supplied them.

A moment later the slave-woman, silent and invisible as death itself, approached the opening, her punk in her hand to serve her in place of a torch. It afforded less light than a glowworm, yet for her its tiny red sufficed.

"You have come back," she said, coldly, as she recognized the face revealed by Luey's candle. "If you have aught to say to me, put out your flame."

Trembling with excitement, Luey obey-

ed. Utter darkness closed upon him. Hastily then, and in a voice betraying fears and hopes alternately, he brought to her memory a quick recollection of who he was and what he had done in her own behalf, and then abruptly begged her to let him take away the child she kept there prisoner, for whom he would pay her all the cash he then possessed—a matter of nearly a hundred American dollars.

The woman, whose presence was indicated only by the tiny spark of her punk-stick's light—that moved in its arc with her breathing,—laughed in a low, mirthless manner, most chilling and dreadful to hear.

"You must be a madman of selfishness," she said, in swiftly rising emotion, which was partially alarm. "What are you that you ask for the child of me? What are you to me—or to any of the gods? What dream is upon you that you come to me with a speech like this, and ask so much of such as I? Begone with thy selfish need, and count up the cost of what you would desire."

Luey was filled with dread, not only by her words, but also by the tones of her harshly strident voice. Yet youth is eager and hopeful. He pleaded with her warmly; he called her by the names of womanhood now doubly precious to her nature. He beseeched her in the name of mercy toward the helpless little slave to relent and lend him assistance.

"Do you know what you do?" she cried to him, wildly. "Do you understand that at last I *live*—here in this wretched security? *Live*—do you hear me say it?—*live*! For the last ten days I have lived at last—I, in my paint that conceals me and deceives the child—I, that see the sun but once in a day—I, the morally dead! Begone. Draw no more from the spring in my withered breast, for it aches with every drop that flows—it aches!—it aches!" and she struck herself on the bosom with the hand that held the punk, and the spark of light vibrated madly back and forth, making designs of fire-line in the gloom.

"With an aching spring in your heart how may you think on little Suey, come to sale and to utter despair, a few years hence?" said Luey, ardently. "A mother by blood would gladly send away her most beloved child from such a life."

"A mother by blood," repeated the woman, to herself. Then she answered him again in her wilder strain. "Ay, ay—but at last I live, I tell you, boy. The child has brought me life. She is mine—all mine! She loves none other. And I have striven to be loved. You bid me quench even this spark of light by which I live and move in my darkness. I am not good. It is now too late to change. I cannot now be good or generous. I have exhausted my all of virtue in my strife to be loved."

Luey Mow was silent for a moment. Then he said: "And how shall little Suey love you five and ten years hence, when pure, grateful lips should beg for thy peace from the gods?"

"Why were you born to come and taunt me in an hour like this?" she demanded, almost fiercely, in reply. "If I gave you the child to-night, my heart would lose its life to see her go, and to-morrow I should lie here dead, to pay the price of treachery. I am promised speedy butchery if I lose her now, and my arms will be empty to aching should she go."

Luey was amply aware of the fact that the place was unceasingly guarded.

"I could not take her safely hence to-night," he said, eagerly pressing the woman's softening mood. "Give me but a little help, however, and I will make the plan to convey her, and you also, from this prison-hole. These window-bars are old and weak. I can take them out like lumps out of bread; and through here Suey Ling and you may pass. The way of it all you may leave to me; and I beseech you to say you will do this thing for the sake of the child who gives you love."

The woman was silent. Against the background of darkness she drew eccentric figures with the light end of her punk. Luey Mow could not in the gloom discern the evidence of conflict that passed across her painted face.

"What answer give you—mother?" he asked through the grating.

Her heart now had within it, in addition to mothering hunger, a spark of something merciful and pitying, perhaps as small as the dot of red that served her for a torch. She could only grope by the light of either spark, and she groped by a way most rough and narrow.

Luey Mow had called her "mother"—an appellation she had long since ceased hoping to hear. And she knew feebly what a mother would do. She was less than a mother, yet more than a mother, in a way, to little Suey Ling.

"I shall never leave this place alive; I shall never look fairly on the sun again, but—perhaps I will help," she said, every word delivered with an effort. And suffering poignantly at the birth of some lofty resolve, snatched thus untimely from her nature, she added, "When shall it be?"

"On the night of confusion, when the dragon walks," said Luey Mow, excitedly. "And that is two nights hence."

"The dragon?" she echoed. She had once been known as "the female dragon" herself.

"Ay—there will be much diversion, for it walks in mighty glory," answered Luey. "That night these bars will be battered down, and you will know the manner to assist me, and likewise the plan to escape this place yourself."

"I shall never escape from here," she answered, quietly. "I shall have no wish to go. And who will mourn? Begone, mad boy, and come again to-morrow night."

In silence she left the window, her spark of light the one thing visible in all that velvet gloom—a tiny beacon, retreating, diminishing, then gone to some deeper mystery beyond.

It was nearly nine o'clock when at last the hum of excited expectation in the crowded streets of Chinatown became abruptly pregnant of news that the dragon was fairly afoot.

A din of clashing brass and beaten drums arose like a demon's alarm on the vibrant air. Chinese music, triumphant and sufficiently awful to affright the most intrepid demon, had broken from the instruments in charge of Oriental virtuosos. Excitement billowed like sea waves, heaving through the mass of humanity that thronged the streets. A glare of lights, a fusillade of viciously exploding firecrackers, a yelling of demon beaters, and an outflaming of colored banners, fire, and pandemonium suddenly advertised the event.

From the dragon's path ran an army

of evil creations, enacted by sweating Chinese with the most grotesque of masks and regalia on their persons.

The din increased; the snapping and snarling of a thousand petty firecrackers, exploding like machine-guns in battle, added yet more confusion to the flight of evil spirits. But factitious demons, fire-eaters, artists in music, bearers of standards—all were neglected, all were ignored, the instant the huge and awful head of the dragon himself at last appeared, followed by all the mighty horror of his sinuously winding body.

And he was tremendous. The fabled sea-serpent of a hundred coils was dwarfed into utter insignificance by the fearful reality of this stupendous thing. For nearly the length of two short city blocks his glistening claw-footed body extended, his painted scales flinging reds and greens and reflected lights from surfaces innumerable, while his tortuous body writhed in truly gigantic proportions, from one crowded sidewalk to the other.

Behind the head, and in front of the first great clawlike pair of the monster's many feet, situated a rod or more along the body, was the outswell of the structure where Lucy Mow, the heart of the monster, held dominion.

Through street after street the serpent writhed, until at last, by Lucy's plans, it invaded the somewhat obscure and insignificant thoroughfare wherein lay the basement employed as a prison for little Suey Ling, the parentless.

True to her word, the slave-woman, waiting for the sign, now clambered through the aperture between her darkened basement and the one wherein the dragon's skin had recently been stored. In her arms she held the frightened, silenced child.

To the trap that led forth to the sidewalk she came, and standing beneath it, waited in excitement well-nigh insupportable. Nearer and nearer drew the noise of the dragon's awful peregrination. A half-smothered cry of bereavement, not

quite to be controlled, escaped the slave-woman waiting in the dark. Spasmodically she folded the little captive to her aching heart and then lifted her up towards Luey's reaching arms.

In childish terror little Suey dropped her headless doll and with both small hands clung tightly to the woman, who underwent one sweet, wild pang of ecstasy and despair at this touch of love and confidence. Then the heart of the dragon closed its arms quite about the baby form and drew her snugly upward to itself. The great, kind reptile had taken her in.

The door fell noiselessly back to its place above the head of the woman, whose one last glimpse of life and light was ended.

Stolid in her fright, little Suey could do nothing but hold to the warm, softly speaking human being that embraced her. And the dragon proceeded on its way, its "heart" most humanly tender.

Fifteen minutes later the trembling child was gently dropped into the arms of a certain blue-eyed young woman of the mighty white man's family—just as the heart of the dragon crossed another basement orifice, under the dexterous management of the faithful Luey Mow.

In the morning a sunbeam, entering the basement prison to search for tiny Suey, found the slave-woman lying on the earth. Beneath the paint still left upon her countenance dwelt a smile and a shadow of beauty such as death alone may bestow. Held in her arm, against her breast, was the poor old doll little Suey had dropped at the parting.

At the quaint, pretty wedding of Nik-ku Loy and Lucy Mow—a ceremony half Oriental, half of the humdrum Occident itself—a cluster of fragrant, starlike flowers was given to the pretty bride by her blue-eyed sponsor and friend from the home of rescued slaves, who held little Suey in her arms.

Lucy's sacred Chinese lily was in bloom.

